



LUCAS MORNEAU
QUEER NEWFOUNDLAND HOCKEY LEAGUE (QNHL)

I'm Screeching!: Towards a Queer Newfoundland Aesthetic

Queer Newfoundlanders are often torn between the heteropatriarchal traditions of our cultural identity and our queerness. Morneau finds the intersections of these identities in humour, costume and sport. The *Queer Newfoundland Hockey League* takes hockey as its subject, invoking masculine tropes and the physicality of sport. Newfoundland cultural practices that are traditionally associated with gendered, classed, domestic spaces, including crocheting and doilies, are the material foundation of the *QNHL*. By juxtaposing two highly gendered spaces through humour, drag and camp, Morneau works towards a queer Newfoundland aesthetic.

1. *I dies at you: grief, humour, camp*

Newfoundlanders have always used humour to cope with the unimaginable, to navigate the grief-laden spaces where logic and sense fail us. The strange alchemy of using humour to survive trauma is one that relies on a camp sensibility of irony, wit and a deep awareness of oppression. Morneau blends Newfoundland humour with queer camp quickness to toy with gender. As Sue Ellen-Case (1993) asserts, “camp both articulates the lives of homosexuals through the obtuse use of irony and inscribes their oppression with the same device” (pp. 298). The playful quickness of camp is always responsive to the context of oppression from which it emerges.

From mummering to a deeply entrenched love of that blue tin of little sausages, Newfoundlanders get up to all sorts of foolishness. Being mischievous, cheeky or even difficult, ‘just for badness’ as my Nan would say (meaning for the fun of it), reminds me of the joy in rebellion. *QNHL* demonstrates some of the many ways in which revolt and play are entangled. Morneau certainly gets up to all sorts of foolishness, particularly the drag icons that grace a series of highly sought after (I'm sure) collectible hockey cards. Like waiting for the name of your community to roll by NTV's alphabetic New Year's Eve countdown in your Nan's living room, each imagined *QNHL* team affectionately gestures towards a specific community. Each team name reclaims derogatory, homophobic and transphobic slurs. Every hockey card features a player adorned in drag aesthetics.

2. *Who knit you?: the contexts that shape us*

To reiterate, camp is always responsive to the context of oppression from which it emerges. Morneau gestures towards this context through textiles. Like humour, knitting and crocheting is another cultural staple of survival in Newfoundland and Labrador. Morneau's contemporary creation of garments, including hockey jerseys and doily goalie masks, emerge from cultural legacies of survival, labour, and beauty that reflect place specific histories of race, class, gender, ability and sexuality. There are complex and generative entanglements between queer contemporary artworks and the culturally specific histories from which they emerge.

Like many beautiful and strange material cultures, textiles and traditions in Newfoundland, knitwear emerged from specific necessities. Classed histories of gender and rurality form the use, need and structure of knitwear. Knit garments often trace violent histories of crisis and survival, aesthetic engagement with beauty and adornment, as well as important markers of identity, culture and place. Morneau's jerseys are no exception.

3. *I'll admit I don't know much about hockey*

I first followed professional hockey in 2020 watching the Montréal Canadiens make their way to the Stanley Cup final. The drama of an underdog narrative, the stakes of a corporate enterprise, my frantic googling of every player's personal background all contributed to me (having previously never watched hockey ever before in my life) being emotionally invested and on the edge of my seat, palms sweating, every game. I reveled in the wins, was giddy with the shocking twists of each comeback, grieved at the losses, and formed impassioned standpoints on coaching and management decisions. I'll also admit that after following the drama of the 2020 Stanley Cup, I haven't watched a game of hockey since. But my heart is hopeful that the *QNHL* will get a slot on NTV.

Hockey, particularly professional leagues, is both formed by and works to reify heteropatriarchal gender roles. Racist mascots, sexual assault, mental health crises, homophobia and transphobia, addictions, life threatening injuries, domestic violence, long term brain damage: these are some of the widespread expressions of hegemonic masculinity that can be found in professional hockey. By juxtaposing such a sport with queer aesthetics such as drag, Morneau works to challenge heteropatriarchal order through the lexicon of camp.

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image (front): Lucas Morneau, *Leading Tickle Lesbos*, 2020. Crocheted and rug-hooked wool yarn on burlap

Queer Newfoundland Hockey League (QNHL) is a fictional hockey league made up of 14 teams, all of which use pejoratives used against the LGBTQ2QIA+ community as team names. QNHL uses these pejoratives to reclaim the words often used against queer individuals both on and off the ice. These pejoratives, such as sissy and fag, are also often used against individuals who do not conform to the hegemonic masculinity often assigned to sports – teammates often cannot be emotional, cannot draw attention to themselves, nor talk about personal issues without fear of reprisal.

Each jersey is hand crocheted and rughooked, using craft practices often delegated as “women’s work”. Some jerseys are rughooked using pantyhose worn by drag performers, referencing the history of rughooking in Newfoundland and the Grenfell Mission’s use of stockings from women around rural communities in the province. Some jerseys reference historical teams from the numerous senior hockey leagues that have existed in the province’s history, while others utilise colours no longer found on NHL jerseys. For example, purple was quite a popular colour used on many jerseys such as the Los Angeles Kings and the Anaheim Ducks (then known as the Mighty Ducks), both of which have since switched to mostly black jerseys.

The jerseys are paired with 10 crochet goalie masks, stylized as doilies. These goalie doilies reference the introduction of the goalie mask and its first full-time NHL user Jacques Plante, who was ridiculed and mocked for wearing a mask after sustaining serious injuries during a game. Many players and fans questioned Plante’s bravery and dedication to the game due to his mask, though it gained acceptance after Plante compared not wearing a mask to skydiving without a parachute, “if a man jumps out of an airplane without a parachute, does that make him brave?” (“Masks for goalies gain acceptance”). Each team also is paired with a hockey card of a fictional player, comprising of men, women, and gender-nonconforming characters. Each pack of hockey cards packed with a stick of ABC (already been chewed) gum.

QNHL, by reclaiming these pejoratives, aims to deconstruct homophobia in sports and sports culture and critique the existing hegemonic masculinity in sports culture. By bringing awareness to the toxic elements of the current hegemonic masculinity, QNHL aims to create a new, positive, and accepting hegemonic masculinity for sports enthusiast.

- Lucas Morneau, 2022

“Masks for goalies gain acceptance”. Spokesman-Review. (Spokane, Washington). Associated Press. November 23, 1969. p. 7, sports.

Lucas Morneau (he/they) is a queer interdisciplinary artist and curator of settler descent from Ktaqamkuk (Newfoundland and Labrador, Canada) and based in Sikniktuk in Mi’kma’ki (Sackville, New Brunswick). They received their Bachelor of Fine Arts in Visual Arts at Memorial University – Grenfell Campus in 2016, and their Master of Fine Arts (Studio Art) at University of Saskatchewan in 2018. They have exhibited artwork across Canada and the United Kingdom, including solo exhibitions throughout the Atlantic Provinces. In 2016, they were the winner of the BMO First Art Award for Newfoundland and Labrador and in 2018, the recipient of the Cox & Palmer Pivotal Point Grant. Their work has been supported by the Canada Council for the Arts, ArtsNL, and Cox&Palmer with VANL-CARFAC. Using photography, fibre art, performance, video, installation, printmaking, and sculpture, their work is autobiographical and based in social activism. Through the alter-ego The Queer Mummer, they deconstruct gender norms and challenges homophobic and heteronormative attitudes still prevalent in Western society.
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